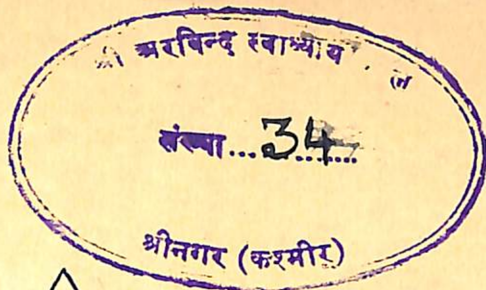
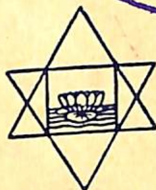
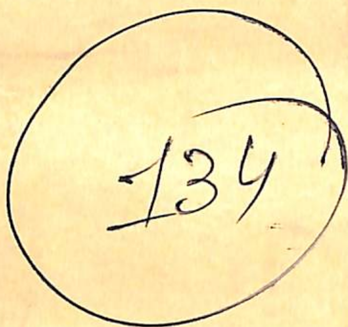




SRI AUROBINDO

KALIDASA



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THE AGE OF KALIDASA

Valmiki, Vyasa and Kalidasa are the essence of the history of ancient India; if all else were lost, they would still be its sole and sufficient cultural history. Their poems are types and exponents of three periods in the development of the human soul, types and exponents also of the three great powers which dispute and clash in the imperfect and half-formed temperament and harmonise in the formed and perfect. At the same time, their works are pictures at once minute and grandiose of three moods of our Aryan civilisation, of which the first was predominatingly moral, the second predominatingly intellectual, the third predominatingly material. The fourth power of the soul, the spiritual, which can alone govern and harmonise the others by fusion with them, had not, though it pervaded and powerfully influenced each successive development, any separate age of predomi-

nance, did not like the others possess the whole race with a dominating obsession. It is because, conjoining in themselves the highest and most varied poetical gifts, they at the same time represent and mirror their age and humanity by their interpretative largeness and power that our three chief poets hold their supreme place and bear comparison with the greatest world-names, Homer, Shakespeare and Dante.

It has been said truly that the Ramayana represents an ideal society and assumed illogically that it must therefore represent an altogether imaginary one. The argument ignores the alternative of a real society idealised. No poet could evolve entirely out of his own imagination a picture at once so colossal, so minute and so consistent in every detail. No number of poets could do it without stumbling into fatal incompatibilities either of fact or of view, such as we find defacing the Mahabharata. This is not the place to discuss the question of Valmiki's age and authorship. This much, however, may be said that after excluding

the Uttarakanda which is a later work, and some amount of interpolation for the most part easy enough to detect, and reforming the text which is not unfrequently in a state of truly shocking confusion, the Ramayana remains on the face of it the work of a single, mighty and embracing mind. It is not easy to say whether it preceded or followed in date Vyasa's epic; it is riper in form and tone, has some aspects of a more advanced and mellow culture, and yet it gives the general impression of a younger humanity and an earlier, less sophisticated and complex mind. The nature of the poem and much of its subject-matter might at least justify the conclusion that Valmiki wrote in a political and social atmosphere much resembling that which surrounded Vyasa. He lived, that is to say, in an age approaching the present disorder and turmoil, of great revolutions and unbridled aristocratic violence, when the governing chivalry, the Kshatriya caste, in its pride of strength was asserting its own code of morals as the one rule of conduct. We may note the plain assertion of this standpoint by

Jarasandha in the Mahabharata and Valmiki's emphatic and repeated protest against it through the mouth of Rama. This ethical code was, like all aristocratic codes of conduct, full of high chivalry and the spirit of *noblesse oblige*, but a little loose in sexual morality on the masculine side and indulgent to violence and the strong hand. To the pure and delicate moral temperament of Valmiki, imaginative, sensitive, enthusiastic, shot through with rays of visionary idealism and ethereal light, this looseness and violence were shocking and abhorrent. He could sympathise with them, as he sympathised with all that was wild and evil and anarchic, with the imaginative and poetical side of his nature, because he was a universal creative mind driven by his art-sense to penetrate, feel and re-embody all that the world contained; but to his intellect and peculiar emotional temperament they were distasteful. He took refuge therefore in a past age of national greatness and virtue, distant enough to be idealised, but near enough to have left sufficient materials for a great picture of civilisation which would

serve his purpose—an age, it is important to note, of grandiose imperial equipoise such as must have existed in some form at least, since a persistent tradition of it runs through Sanskrit literature. In the framework of this imperial age, his puissant imagination created a marvellous picture of the human world as it might be if the actual and existing forms and materials of society were used to the best and purest advantage, and an equally marvellous picture of another non-human world in which aristocratic violence, strength, self-will, lust and pride ruled supreme and idealised or rather colossalised. He brought these two worlds into warlike collision by the hostile meeting of their champions and utmost evolutions of their peculiar character-types, Rama and Ravana, and so created the Ramayana, the grandest and most paradoxical poem in the world which becomes unmatchably sublime by disdaining all consistent pursuit of sublimity, supremely artistic by putting aside all the conventional limitations of art, magnificently dramatic by disregarding all dramatic illusion, and uniquely

epic by handling the least as well as the most epic material. Not all perhaps can enter at once into the spirit of this masterpiece; but those who have once done so, will never admit any poem in the world as its superior.

My point here, however, is that it gives us the picture of an entirely moralised civilisation, containing indeed vast material development and immense intellectual power, but both moralised and subordinated to the needs of purity of temperament and delicate ideality of action. Valmiki's mind seems nowhere to be familiarised with the high-strung intellectual gospel of a high and severe Dharma culminating in a passionless activity, raised to a supreme spiritual significance in the Gita, which is one great key-note of the Mahabharata. Had he known it, the strong leaven of sentimentalism and feminity in his nature might well have rejected it; such temperaments when they admire strength, admire it manifested and forceful rather than self-contained. Valmiki's characters act from emotional or imaginative enthusiasm, not from intellectual

conviction; an enthusiasm of morality actuates Rama, an enthusiasm of immorality tyrannises over Ravana. Like all mainly moral temperaments, he instinctively insisted on one old established code of morals being universally observed as the only basis of ethical stability, avoided casuistic developments and distasted innovators in metaphysical thought as by their persistent and searching questions dangerous to the established bases of morality, especially to its wholesome ordinariness and every-dayness. Valmiki, therefore, the father of our secular poetry, stands for that early and finely moral civilisation which was the true heroic age of the Hindu spirit.

The poet of the Mahabharata lives nearer to the centre of an era of aristocratic turbulence and disorder. If there is any kernel of historic truth in the story of the poem, it records the establishment of those imperial forms of government and society which Valmiki had idealised. Behind its poetic legend it celebrates and approves the policy of a great Kshatriya leader of men who aimed at the subjection of his order to the rule of a

central imperial Power which should typify its best tendencies and control or expel its worst. But while Valmiki was a soul out of harmony with its surroundings and looking back to an ideal past, Vyasa was a man of his time, profoundly in sympathy with it, full of its tendencies, hopeful of its results and looking forward to an ideal future. The one might be described as a conservative idealist advocating return to a better but departed model, the other is a progressive realist looking forward to a better but unborn model. Vyasa accordingly does not revolt from the aristocratic code of morality; it harmonises with his own proud and strong spirit and he accepts it as a basis for conduct, but purified and transfigured by the illuminating idea of the *nishkama karma.*

But, above all, intellectuality is his grand note; he is profoundly interested in ideas, in metaphysics, in ethical problems; he subjects morality to casuistic tests from which the more delicate moral tone of Valmiki's spirit shrank; he boldly erects above ordinary ethics a higher principle of conduct having its springs in

intellect and strong character; he treats government and society from the standpoint of a practical and discerning statesmanlike mind, idealising solely for the sake of a standard. He touches, in fact, all subjects and whatever he touches he makes fruitful and interesting by originality, penetration and a sane and bold vision. In all this he is the son of the civilisation he has mirrored to us, a civilisation in which both morality and material development are powerfully intellectualised. Nothing is more remarkable in all the characters of the Mahabharata than this puissant intellectualism; every action of theirs seems to be impelled by an immense driving force of mind solidifying in character and therefore conceived and outlined as in stone. This orgiastic force of the intellect is at least as noticeable as the impulse of moral or immoral enthusiasm behind each great action of the Ramayana. Throughout the poem the victorious and manifold mental activity of an age is prominent and gives its character to its civilisation. There is far more of thought in action than in the Ramayana, far less of thought in repose;

the one pictures a time of gigantic creative ferment and disturbance; the other, as far as humanity is concerned, an ideal age of equipoise, tranquillity and order.

Many centuries after these poets, perhaps a thousand years or even more, came the third great embodiment of the national consciousness, Kalidasa. There is a far greater difference between the civilisation he mirrors than between Vyasa's and Valmiki's. He came when the daemonic orgy of character and intellect had worked itself out and ended in producing at once its culmination and reaction in Buddhism. There was everywhere noticeable a petrifying of the national temperament, visible to us in the tendency to codification; philosophy was being codified, morals were being codified, knowledge of any and every sort was being codified; it was on one side of its nature an age of scholars, legislators, dialecticians, philosophical formalisers. On the other side, the creative and aesthetic enthusiasm of the nation was pouring itself into things material, into the life of the senses, into the pride of life and beauty. The arts of painting,

architecture, song, dance, drama, gardening, jewellery, all that can administer to the wants of great and luxurious capitals, received a grand impetus which brought them to their highest technical perfection. That this impetus came from Greek sources or from the Buddhists seems hardly borne out: the latter may rather have shared in the general tendencies of the time than originated them, and the Greek theory gives us a maximum of conclusions with a minimum of facts. I do not think, indeed, it can be maintained that this period, call it classical or material or what one will, was marked off from its predecessor by any clear division: such a partition would be contrary to the law of human development. Almost all the concrete features of the age may be found as separate facts in ancient India: codes existed from old time; art and drama were of fairly ancient origin, to whatever date we may assign their development; physical yoga processes existed almost from the first, and the material development portrayed in the Ramayana and Mahabharata is hardly less splendid than that of which the Raghuvamsa

is so brilliant a picture. But whereas before, these were subordinated to more lofty ideals, now they prevailed and became supreme, occupying the best energies of the race and stamping themselves on its life and consciousness. In obedience to this impulse the centuries between the rise of Buddhism and the advent of Shankaracharya became—though not agnostic and sceptical, for they rejected violently the doctrines of Charvak—yet profoundly scientific and outward-going even in their spiritualism. It was therefore the great age of formalised metaphysics, science, law, art and the sensuous luxury which accompanies the arts.

Nearer the beginning than the end of this period, when India was systematising her philosophies and developing her arts and sciences, turning from Upanishad to Purana, from the high rarefied peaks of early Vedanta and Sankhya with their inspiring sublimities and bracing keenness to physical methods of ascetic yoga and the dry intellectualism of metaphysical logic or else to the warm sensuous humanism of emotional religion, before its

full tendencies had asserted themselves, in some spheres before it had taken the steps its attitude portended, Kalidasa arose in Ujjayini and gathered up in himself its present tendencies while he foreshadowed many of its future developments. He himself must have been a man gifted with all the learning of his age, rich, aristocratic, moving wholly in high society, familiar with and fond of life in the most luxurious metropolis of his time, passionately attached to the arts, acquainted with the sciences, deep in law and learning, versed in the formalised philosophies. He has some notable resemblances to Shakespeare; among others his business was, like Shakespeare's, to sum up the immediate past in the terms of the present: at the same time he occasionally informed the present with hints of the future. Like Shakespeare also he seems not to have cared deeply for religion. In creed he was a Vedantist and in ceremony, perhaps, a Shiva-worshipper, but he seems rather to have accepted these as the orthodox forms of his time and country, recommended to him by his intellectual preference and aesthetic affinities,

than to have satisfied with them any profound religious want. In morals also he accepted and glorified the set and scientifically elaborate ethics of the codes, but seems himself to have been destitute of the finer elements of morality. We need not accept any of the ribald and witty legends with which the Hindu decadence surrounded his name; but no unbiassed student of Kalidasa's poetry can claim for him either moral fervour or moral strictness. His writings show indeed a keen appreciation of high ideal and lofty thought, but the appreciation is aesthetic in its nature: he elaborates and seeks to bring out the effectiveness of these on the imaginative sense of the noble and grandiose, applying to the things of the mind and soul the same aesthetic standard as to the things of sense themselves. He has also the natural, high, aristocratic feeling for all that is proud and great and vigorous, and so far as he has it, he has exaltation and sublimity; but aesthetic grace and beauty and symmetry sphere in the sublime and prevent it from standing out with the bareness and boldness which is the sublime's natural

presentation. His poetry has therefore never been, like the poetry of Valmiki and Vyasa, a great dynamic force for moulding heroic character or noble or profound temperament. In all this he represented the highly vital and material civilisation to which he belonged.

Yet some dynamic force a poet must have, some general human inspiration of which he is the supreme exponent; or else he cannot rank with the highest. Kalidasa is the great, the supreme poet of the senses, of aesthetic beauty, of sensuous emotion. His main achievement is to have taken every poetic element, all great poetical forms and subdued them to a harmony of artistic perfection set in the key of sensuous beauty. In continuous gift of seizing an object and creating it to the eye he has no rival in literature. A strong visualising faculty, such as the greatest poets have in their most inspired descriptive moments, was with Kalidasa an abiding and unfailing power and the concrete presentation which this definiteness of vision demanded, suffused with an intimate and sovereign feeling for beauty of colour and beauty of form, con-

stitutes the characteristic Kalidasian manner. He is besides a consummate artist, profound in conception and suave in execution, a master of sound and language who has moulded for himself out of the infinite possibilities of the Sanskrit tongue a verse and diction which are absolutely the grandest, most puissant and most full-voiced of any human speech, a language of the Gods. The note struck by Kalidasa when he built Sanskrit into that palace of noble sound, is the note which meets us in almost all the best works of the classic literature. Its characteristic features of style are a compact but never abrupt brevity, a soft gravity and smooth majesty, a noble harmony of verse, a strong and lucid beauty of chiselled prose, above all, an epic precision of phrase, weighty, sparing and yet full of colour and sweetness. Moreover, it is admirably flexible, suiting itself to all forms from the epic to the lyric, but most triumphantly to the two greatest, the epic and the drama. In his epic style Kalidasa adds to these permanent features a more than Miltonic fullness and grandiose pitch of sound and expression, in

his dramatic an extraordinary grace and suavity which makes it adaptable to conversation and the expression of dramatic shade and subtly blended emotion.

With these supreme gifts Kalidasa had the advantage of being born into an age with which he was in temperamental sympathy and a civilisation which lent itself naturally to his peculiar descriptive genius. It was an aristocratic civilisation, as indeed were those which had preceded it, but it far more nearly resembled the aristocratic civilisations of Europe by its material luxury, its aesthetic tastes, its polite culture, its keen worldly wisdom and its excessive appreciation of wit and learning. Religious and ethical thought and sentiment were cultivated much as in France under Louis XIV, more in piety and profession than as swaying the conduct; they pleased the intellect or else touched the sentiment, but did not govern the soul. It was bad taste to be irreligious, but it was not bad taste to be sensual or even in some respects immoral. The splendid and luxurious courts of this period supported the orthodox religion and morals

out of convention, conservatism, the feeling for established order and the inherited tastes and prejudices of centuries, not because they fostered any deep religious or ethical sentiment. Yet they applauded high moral ideas if presented to them in cultured and sensuous poetry much in the same spirit that they applauded voluptuous description similarly presented. The ideals of morality were much lower than of old; free drinking was openly recognised and indulged in by both sexes; purity of life was less valued than in any other period of our civilisation. Yet the unconquerable monogamous instinct of the high-class Hindu woman seems to have prevented promiscuous vice and the disorganisation of the home which was the result of a similar state of society in ancient Rome, in Italy of the Renascence, in France under the Bourbons and in England under the later Stuarts. The old spiritual tendencies were also rather latent than dead, the mighty pristine ideals still existed in theory, —they are outlined with extraordinary grandeur by Kalidasa,—nor had they yet been weakened or lowered to a less heroic key. It

was a time in which one might expect to meet the extremes of indulgence side by side with the extremes of renunciation; for the inherent spirituality of the Hindu nature finally revolted against the splendid and unsatisfying life of the senses. But of this phase Bhartrihari and not Kalidasa is the poet. The greater writer lived evidently in the full heyday of the material age, and there is no sign of any setting in of the sickness and dissatisfaction and disillusionment which invariably follow a long outburst of materialism.

The flourishing of the plastic arts had prepared surroundings of great external beauty of the kind needed for Kalidasa's poetic work. The appreciation of beauty in Nature, of the grandeur of mountain and forest, the loveliness of lakes and rivers, the charm of bird and beast life had become a part of contemporary culture. These and the sensitive appreciation of trees and plants and hills as living things, the sentimental feeling of brotherhood with animals which had influenced and been encouraged by Buddhism, the romantic mythological world still farther romanticised by

Kalidasa's warm humanism and fine poetic sensibility, gave him exquisite grace and grandeur of background and scenic variety. The delight of the eye, the delight of the ear, smell, palate, touch, the satisfaction of the imagination and taste are the texture of his poetical creation, and into this he has worked the most beautiful flowers of emotion and intellectual or aesthetic ideality. The scenery of his work is a universal paradise of beautiful things. All therein obeys one law of earthly grace; morality is aestheticised, intellect suffused and governed with the sense of beauty. And yet this poetry does not swim in languor, does not dissolve itself in sensuous weakness; it is not heavy with its own dissoluteness, heavy of curl and heavy of eyelid, cloyed by its own sweets, as the poetry of the senses usually is. Kalidasa is saved from this by the chastity of his style, his aim at burdened precision and energy of phrase, his unsleeping artistic vigilance.

As in the Ramayana and Mahabharata we have an absorbing intellect-impulse or a dynamic force of moral or immoral excitement

driving the characters, so we have in Kalidasa an intense hedonistic impulse thrilling through speech and informing action. An imaginative pleasure in all shades of thought and of sentiment, a rich delight of the mind in its emotions, a luxuriousness of ecstasy and grief, a free abandonment to amorous impulse and rapture, a continual joy of life and seeking of beauty mark the period when India, having for the time exhausted the possibilities of soul-experience attainable through the spirit and the imaginative reason, was now attempting to find out the utmost each sense could feel, probing and sounding the soul-possibilities in Matter and even seeking God through the senses. The emotional religion of the Vaishnava Puranas which takes, as its type of the relation between the human soul and the Supreme, the passion of a woman for her lover, was already developing. The corresponding Tantric development of Shaivism may not yet have established itself fully; but the concretisation of the idea of Purusha-Prakriti, the union of Ishwara and Shakti, from which it arose, was already there in the symbolic

legends of the Puranas and one of these is the subject of Kalidasa's greatest epic poem. The Birth of the War-God stands on the same height in classical Sanskrit as the Paradise Lost in English literature: it is the masterpiece and *magnum opus* of the age on the epic level. The central idea of this great unfinished poem, the marriage of Shiva and Parvati, typified in its original idea the union of Purusha and Prakriti, the supreme Soul and dynamic Nature by which the world is created; but this type of divine legend was used esoterically to typify also the Nature-Soul's search for and attainment of God and something of this conception pierces through the description of Parvati's seeking after Shiva. Such was the age of Kalidasa, the temper of the civilisation which produced him; other poets of the time expressed one side of it or another, but his work is its splendid integral epitome, its picture of many composite hues and tones. Of the temperament of that civilisation the Seasons is an immature poetic self-expression, the House of Raghu the representative epic, the Cloud Messenger the descriptive elegy,

Shakuntala with its two sister love-plays intimate dramatic pictures and the Birth of the War-God the grand religious fable. Kalidasa, who expressed so many sides and faces of it in writing, stands for its representative man and genius, as was Vyasa of the intellectual mood of Indian civilisation and Valmiki of its moral side.

It was the supreme misfortune of India that before she was able to complete the round of her experience and gather up the fruit of her long millenniums of search and travail by commencing a fourth and more perfect age in which moral, intellectual and material development should be all equally harmonised and all spiritualised, the inrush of barbarians broke in finally on her endless solitary *tapasya* of effort and beat her national life into fragments. A preparation for such an age may be glimpsed in the new tendencies of spiritual seeking that began with Shankara and continued in later Vaishnavism and Shaivism and in new turns of poetry and art, but it found no opportunity of seizing on the total life of the nation and throwing it into another mould.

The work was interrupted before it had well begun; and India was left with only the remnants of the culture of the material age to piece out her existence. Yet even the little that was done afterwards proved to be much; for it saved her from gradually petrifying and perishing as almost all the old civilisations of Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Rome, petrified and perished, as the material civilisation of Europe, unless spiritualised, must before long petrify and perish. That there is still an unexhausted vitality in her, that she yet nourishes the seeds of rebirth and renewal, we owe to Shankara and his successors and the great minds and souls that came after them. Will she yet arise, new combine her past and continue the great dream where she left it off, shaking off, on the one hand, the soils and filth that have grown on her in her period of downfall and futile struggle, and re-asserting, on the other, her peculiar individuality and national type against the callow civilisation of the West with its dogmatic and intolerant knowledge, its still more dogmatic and intolerant ignorance, its deification of selfishness

and force, its violence and its ungoverned Titanism? In doing so lies her one chance of salvation.

KALIDASA'S "SEASONS"

I. Its Authenticity

The "Seasons" of Kalidasa is one of those early works of a great poet which are even more interesting to a student of his evolution than his later masterpieces. We see his characteristic gift even in the immature workmanship and uncertain touch and can distinguish the persistent personality in spite of the defective self-expression. Where external record is scanty, this interest is often disturbed by the question of authenticity and where there is any excuse for the doubt, it has first to be removed. The impulse which leads us to deny authenticity to early and immature work is natural and almost inevitable. When we turn from the great harmonies and victorious imaginations of the master to the raw and perhaps faltering workmanship of these uncertain beginnings, we are irresistibly impelled to cry out, "This

is not by the same hand." But the impulse, however natural, is not always reasonable. The maxim that a poet is born and not made is only true in the sense that great poetical powers are there in the mind of the child and in this sense the same remark might be applied with no less truth to every species of human genius; philosophers, sculptors, painters, critics, orators, statesmen are all born and not made. But because poetical genius is rarer or, at any rate, wider and more lasting in its appeal than any other, the popular mind with its ready gift for seizing one aspect of truth out of many and crystallising error into the form of a proverb, has exalted the poet into a splendid freak of Nature exempt from the general law. If a man without the inborn oratorical fire may be trained into a good speaker or another without the master's inspiration of form and colour work out for himself a blameless technique, so too may a meagre talent become by diligence a machine for producing elegant verse. But poetic genius needs experience and self-discipline as much as any other and by its very complexity

more than most. This is eminently true of great poets with a varied gift. A narrow though a high faculty works best on a single line and may show perfection at an early stage; but powerful and complex minds like Shakespeare or Kalidasa seldom find themselves before a more advanced period. Their previous work is certain to be full of power, promise and genius, but it will also be flawed, unequal and often imitative. This imperfection arises naturally from the greater difficulty in imposing the law of harmony of their various gifts on the bodily case which is the instrument of the spirit's self-expression. To arrive at this harmony requires time and effort and meanwhile the work will often be halting and unequal, varying between inspiration expressed and the failure of vision or expression.

There is no more many-sided, rich and flexible genius in literature than Kalidasa's, and in his case especially we must be on our guard against basing denial of authenticity on imperfection and minor differences. We have to judge, first, by the presence or absence of

the essential and indefinable self of Kalidasa which we find apparent in all his indubitable work, however various the form or subject, and after that on those nameable characteristics which are the grain and fibre of his genius and least imitable by others. In the absence of external evidence, which is in itself of little value unless received from definite and contemporary or almost contemporary sources, the test of personality is all-important. Accidents and details are only useful as corroborative evidence, for these are liable to variation and imitation; but personality is a distinguishable and permanent presence as fugitive to imitation as to analysis. Even a slight fineness of literary palate can perceive the difference between the Nalodaya and Kalidasa's genuine work. Not only does it belong to an age or school in which poetic taste was debased and artificial,—for it is a poetical counterpart of those prose works for whose existence the display of scholarship seems to be the chief justification,—but it presents in this matter of personality and persistent characteristics no sufficient point

of contact either with the Shakuntala or the Kumarasambhava or even with the House of Raghu. But in the Seasons, Kalidasa's personality is distinctly perceived as well as his main characteristics, his force of vision, his architecture of style, his pervading sensuousness, the peculiar temperament of his similes, his characteristic strokes of thought and imagination, his individual and inimitable cast of description. Much of it is as yet in a half-developed state, crude consistence, not yet fashioned with the masterly touch he soon manifested, but Kalidasa is there quite as evidently as Shakespeare in his earlier work, the Venus and Adonis or Lucrece. Defects which the riper Kalidasa avoids, are not uncommon in this poem,—repetition of ideas, use of more words than are absolutely required, haphazard recurrence of words and phrases, not to produce a designed effect but from carelessness, haste or an insufficient vocabulary; there is, moreover, a constant sense of uncertainty in the touch and a frequent lack of finished design. The poet has been in too much haste to vent his sense of

poetic power and not sufficiently careful that the expression should be the best he could compass. And yet immature, greately inferior in chastity and elegance to his best work, marred by serious faults of conception, bearing evidence of hurry and slovenliness in the execution, the Seasons is, for all this, not only suffused by a high though unchastened beauty, but marked with many of the distinctive signs of Kalidasa's strong and exuberant genius. The defects are those natural to the early work of a rich sensuous temperament, eagerly conscious of poetic power but not yet instructed and chastened.

II. The Substance of the Poem

Kalidasa's "Seasons" is perhaps the first poem in any literature written with the express object of describing Nature. It is precisely similar in its aim to a well-known eighteenth-century failure in the same direction—Thomson's Seasons. The names tally, the forms correspond, both poems adopting the plan of devoting a canto to each season, and the method so far agrees that the poets have attempted to depict each season in its principal peculiarities, scenes and characteristic incidents. But here all parallel ends. Wide as the gulf between the genius of one of the greatest world-poets and the talent of the eighteenth-century versifier is the difference between the gathered strength and compact force, the masterly harmonies and the living truth of the ancient Indian poem and the diffuse artificiality and rhetoric of the modern counterpart. And the difference of spirit is not less. A poet of the prosaic and artificial

age when the Anglo-Saxon mind emerged in England and got itself Gallicised, Thomson was unable to grasp the first psychological laws of such descriptive poetry. He fixed his eye on the object, but he could only see the outside of it. Instead of creating he tried to photograph. And he did not remember or did not know that Nature is nothing to poetry except in so far as it is either a frame, setting or ornament to life or else a living presence to the spirit. Nature interpreted by Wordsworth as a part of his own and the universal consciousness, by Shakespeare as an accompaniment or note in the orchestral music of life, by more modern poets as an element of decoration in the living world-picture is possible in poetry; as an independent but dead existence it has no place either in the world itself or in the poet's creation. In his relations to the external, life and mind are the man, the senses being only instruments, and what he seeks outside himself is a response in kind to his own deeper reality. What the eye gathers is only important in so far as it is related to this real man or helps this expec-

tation to satisfy itself. Kalidasa with his fine artistic feeling, his vitality and warm humanism and his profound sense of what true poetry must be, appears to have divined from the beginning the true place of Nature in the poet's outlook. He is always more emotional and intellectual than spiritual, like Shakespeare to whom he has so many striking resemblances. We must not expect from him the magical insight of Valmiki, still less the spiritual discernment of Wordsworth. He looks inside, but not too far inside. But he realises always the supreme importance of life as the only abiding foundation of a poem's immortality.

The first canto is surcharged with the life of men and animals and the life of trees and plants in summer. It sets ringing a note of royal power and passion and promises a poem of unexampled vigour and interest. But to play variations on this note through six cantos seems to have been beyond the young poet's as yet limited experience and narrow imaginative mastery. He fell back on the life of sensuous passion with images of which, no

doubt, his ungoverned youth was most familiar. But instead of working them into the main thought he turned to them for a prop and, when his imaginative memory failed him, multiplied them to make up the deficiency. This lapse from artistic uprightness brought its own retribution, as all such lapses will. From one error indeed Kalidasa's vigour and aspiring temperament saved him. He never relaxed into the cloying and effeminate langour of sensuous description which offends us in Keats' earlier work. The men of the age with all their sensuousness, luxury and worship of outward beauty were a masculine and strenuous race, and their male and vigorous spirit is as prominent in Kalidasa as his laxer tendencies. His sensuousness is not coupled with weak self-indulgence, but is rather a bold and royal spirit seizing the beauty and delight of earth to itself and compelling all the senses to minister to the enjoyment of the spirit rather than enslaving the spirit to do the will of the senses. The difference perhaps amounts to no more than a lesser or greater force of vitality, but it is, for the purposes of

poetry, a real and important difference. The spirit of delightful weakness swooning with excessive beauty gives a peculiar charm of soft laxness to poems like the Endymion, but it is a weakening charm to which no virile temperament will trust itself. The poetry of Kalidasa satisfies the sensuous imagination without enervating the virile chords of character; for virile energy is an unfailing characteristic of the best Sanskrit poetry and Kalidasa is inferior to none in this respect. His artistic error has, nevertheless, had disastrous effects on the substance of his poem.

It is written in six cantos answering to the six Indian seasons, Summer, Rain, Autumn, Winter, Dew and Spring. Nothing can exceed the splendour and power of the opening. We see the poet revelling in the yet virgin boldness, newness and strength of his genius and confident of winning the kingdom of poetry by violence. For a time the brilliance of his work seems to justify his ardour. In the poem on Summer we are at once seized by the marvellous force of imagination, by the unsurpassed closeness and clear strenuousness of his gaze

on the object; in the expression there is a grand and concentrated precision which is our first example of the great Kalidasian manner, and an imperial power, stateliness and brevity of speech which is our first instance of the high classical diction. But this canto stands on a higher level than the rest of the poem. It is as if the poet had spent the best part of his force in his first enthusiasm and kept back an insufficient reserve for the sustained power proper to a long poem. The decline in energy does not disappoint at first. The poem on the Rains gives us a number of fine pictures with a less vigorous touch but a more dignified restraint and a graver and nobler harmony, and even in the Autumn, where the falling off of vigour becomes very noticeable, there is compensation in a more harmonious finish of style, management and imagery. We are led to believe that the poet is finding himself and will rise to a finale of flawless beauty. Then comes disappointment. In the next two cantos Kalidasa seems to lose hold of the subject; the touches of natural description cease or are, with a few exceptions, perfunctory and even

conventional and the full force of his genius is thrown into a series of extraordinary pictures, as vivid as if actually executed in line and colour, of feminine beauty and sensuous passion. The two elements, never properly fused, cease even to stand side by side. For all description of Winter we have a few stanzas describing the cold and the appearance of fields, plants, waters in the wintry days, by no means devoid of beauty but wanting in vigour, closeness of vision and eagerness. In the poem on Dew-tide the original purpose is even fainter. Perhaps the quietness of these seasons, the absence in them of the most brilliant pictorial effects and grandest distinctive features, made them a subject uninspiring to the unripeness and love of violence natural to a richly-endowed temperament in its unschooled youth. But the Spring is the royal season of the Indian year and should have lent itself peculiarly to Kalidasa's inborn passion for colour, sweetness and harmony. The closing canto should have been the crown of the poem. But the poet's sin pursues him and, though we see a distinct effort to recover the old pure

fervour, it is an effort that fails to sustain itself. There is no falling off in harmonious splendour of sound and language, but the soul of inspired poetic observation ceases to inform this beautiful mould and the close fails and languishes. It is noticeable that there is a double close to the Spring, the two versions having been left, after the manner of the old editions, side by side. Kalidasa's strong artistic perception must have suffered acutely from the sense of failure in inspiration and he has accordingly attempted to replace the weak close by an improved and fuller cadence. What is, we may presume, the rejected version, is undoubtedly the weaker of the two but neither of them satisfies. The poem on Spring which should have been the finest, is the most disappointing in the whole series.

III. Its Poetic Value

Nevertheless the Seasons is not only an interesting document in the evolution of a poetic genius of the first rank, but in itself a work of extraordinary force and immense promise. Many of the most characteristic Kalidasian gifts and tendencies are here, some of them in crude and unformed vigour, but characteristic and unmistakable, giving the poem a striking resemblance of spirit and to some extent of form to the House of Raghu, with a far-off prophecy of the mature manner of Kalidasa in the four great masterpieces. There is his power of felicitous and vivid simile; there is the individual turn of his conceits and the single-minded force with which he drives them home; there is his mastering accuracy and life-likeness in description conspicuous especially in the choice and building of the circumstantial epithets. That characteristic of the poet, not the most fundamental and important, which most struck the ancient

critics, *upamāsu kālidāsaḥ*, Kalidasa for similes, is everywhere present even in such early and immature work and already they have the sharp clear Kalidasian ring, true coin of his mint though not yet possessed of the later high values. The deep blue midsummer sky is like a rich purple mass of ground collyrium; girls with their smiling faces and lovelit eyes are like "evenings beautifully jewelled with the moon"; the fires burning in the forest look far-off like clear drops of vermilion; the new blades of grass are like pieces of split emerald; rivers embracing and tearing down the trees on their banks are like evil women distracted with passion, slaying their lovers. In all these instances we have the Kalidasian simile, a little superficial as yet and self-conscious, but for all that Kalidasian. When again he speaks of the Moon towards dawn, growing pale with shame at the lovelier brightness of a woman's face, of the rains coming like the pomp of some great king all blazing with lights, huge clouds moving along like elephants, the lightning like a streaming banner and the thunder like a peal of drums, of the clouds

like archers shooting their rains at the lover from the rainbow stringed with lightning, one recognises, in spite of the occasional extravagance of phrase and violent fancifulness, the Kalidasian form of conceit, not only in the substance which can be borrowed, but in the wording and most of all in the economy of phrase expressing a lavish and ingenious fancy. Still more is this apparent in the sensuous and elaborate comparison of things in Nature to women in ornamental attire,—rivers, autumn, the night, the pale priyungou creeper.

Most decisive of all are the strokes of vivid description that give the poem its main greatness and fulfil its purpose. The seasons live before our eyes as we read. Summer is here with its sweltering heat, the sunbeams burning like fires of sacrifice and the earth swept with whirling gyres of dust driven by intolerable gusts. Yonder lies the lion forgetting his impulse and his mighty leap; his tongue lolls and wearily from time to time he shakes his mane; the snake with lowered head panting and dragging his coils labours over the blazing dust of the road; the wild boars are

digging in the dried mud with their long snouts, as if they would burrow their way into the cool earth; the bisons wander everywhere dumbly, desiring water. The forests are grim and parched, brown and sere; and before long they are in the clutch of fire.... But the rains come, and what may be yonder writhing lines we see on the slopes? It is the young water of the rains, a new-born rivulet, grey and full of insects and dust and weeds, coiling like a snake down the hillside. We watch the beauty of the mountains streaked everywhere with waterfalls, their high rocks kissed by the stooping clouds and their sides a gorgeous chaos of peacocks: on the horizon the great clouds blue as lotus-petals climb hugely into the sky and move across it in slow procession before a sluggish breeze. Or look at yonder covidara tree, its branches troubled softly with wind, swarming with honey-drunken bees and its leaves tender with little opening buds. The moon at night gazes down at us like an unveiled face in the skies, the racing stream dashes its ripples in the wild-duck's face, the wind comes trembling through

the burdened rice-stalks, dancing with the crowding courboucs, making one flowery ripple of the lotus-wooded lake. Here there can be no longer any hesitation. These descriptions which remain perpetually with the eye, visible and concrete as an actual painting, belong, in the force with which they are visualised and the magnificent architecture of phrase with which they are presented, to Kalidasa alone among Sanskrit poets. Other poets, his successors or imitators, such as Bana or even Bhavabhuti,overload their description with words and details; they have often lavish colouring but never an equal power of form; their figures do not appear to stand out of the canvas and live.

And though we do not find here quite the marvellous harmonies of verse and diction we meet in the Raghu, yet we do come across plenty of preparation for them. Here, for instance, is a verse whose rapidity and lightness restrained by a certain half-hidden gravity is distinctly Kalidasa's:

ज्वलति पवनवृद्धः पर्वतानां दरीषु
स्फुटति पटुनिनादैः शुष्कवंशस्थलीषु।

प्रसरति तृणमध्ये लब्धवृद्धिः क्षणेन
ग्लपयति मृगवर्गं प्रान्तलग्नो दवाग्निः ॥

"Clinging to the woodland edges the forest fire increases with the wind and burns in the glens of the mountains; it crackles with shrill shoutings in the dry bamboo reaches; it spreads in the grasses gathering hugeness in a moment and harasses the beasts of the wilderness."

And, again, for honeyed sweetness and buoyancy what can be more Kalidasian than this?

पुंस्कोकिलश्चूतरसासवेन
मत्तः प्रियां चुम्बति रागहृष्टः ।
गुञ्जन् द्विरेफोऽप्ययमम्बुजस्थः
प्रियं प्रियायाः प्रकरोति चाटु ॥

"The male cuckoo, drunk with wine of the juice of the mango flower, kisses his beloved, glad of the sweet attraction, and here the bee murmuring in the lotus-blossom hums flattery's sweetness to his sweet."

There are other stanzas which anticipate something of the ripest Kalidasian movements by their gravity, suavity and strength.

आकम्पयन् कुसुमिताः सहकारशाखा
विस्तारयन् परभृतस्य वचांसि दिक्षु।
वायुर्विवाति हृदयानि हरन्नराणां
नीहारपातविगमात् सुभगो वसन्ते॥

"Making to tremble the flowering branches of the mango trees, spreading the cry of the cuckoo in the regions the wind ranges ravishing the hearts of mortals, by the passing of the dew-falls gracious in the springtide."

If we take Kalidasa anywhere in his lighter metres we shall at once perceive their essential kinship with the verse of the Seasons.

इदमसुलभवस्तुप्रार्थनादुर्निवारं
प्रथममपि मनो मे पञ्चबाणः क्षिणोति।
किमुत मलयवातोन्मीलितापाण्डुवर्ण-
मुपवनसहकारैर्दर्शितेष्वंकुरेषु॥

"Already Love torments my mind importunate in prayer for a thing unattainable; what shall it be when the woodland mango-trees display their buds, a pallid whiteness opening to the southern wind?"

It is the same suave and skilful management, the same exquisite and unobtrusive weaving

of labial, dental and liquid assonances with a recurring sibilant note, the same soft and perfect footing of the syllables. Only the language is richer and more developed. We do not find this peculiar kind of perfection in any other master of classical verse. Bhavabhuti's manner is bold, strenuous, external; Jayadeva's music is based palpably upon assonance and alliteration which he uses with extraordinary brilliance and builds into the most enchanting melodies, but without delicacy, restraint or disguise. If there were any real cause for doubt of the authorship, the verse would clearly vindicate the Seasons for Kalidasa.

Such is this remarkable poem which some, led away by its undoubted splendours, have put in the first rank of Kalidasa's work. Its artistic defects and its comparative crudity forbid us to follow them. It is uncertain in plan, ill-fused, sometimes raw in its imagery, unequal in its execution. But for all that, it must have come upon its contemporaries like the dawning of a new sun in the skies. Its splendid diction and versification, its vigour,

fire and force, its sweetness of spirit and its general promise and to some extent actual presentation of a first-rate poetic genius must have made it a literary event of the first importance. Especially it is significant in its daring gift of sensuousness. The prophet of a hedonistic civilisation here seizes with no uncertain hand on the materials of his work. A vivid and virile interpretation of sense-life in Nature, a similar interpretation of all elements of human life capable of greatness of beauty, seen under the light of the senses and expressed in the terms of an aesthetic appreciation,—this is the spirit of Kalidasa's first work as it is of his last. At present he is concerned only with the outward body of Nature, the physical aspects of things, the vital pleasures and emotions, the joy and beauty of the human body; but it is the first necessary step on the long road of sensuous and poetic experience and expression he has to travel before he reaches his goal in his crowning work, the Birth of the War-God, in which he takes up for treatment one of the supreme fables of the life of the Gods and the Cosmos and in its

handling combines sublimity with grace, height of speech with fullness and beautiful harmony of sound, boldness of descriptive line with magnificence of sensuous colour in a degree of perfection never before or afterwards surpassed or even equalled in poetic literature.



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